

column that appeared on Sunday in the London Times in London, England. It was written by Andrew Sullivan, and frankly I cannot say this better than he did about a President that I have admired literally for many, many years. Let me read and I quote: "He will turn 90 on Tuesday, but in all likelihood he will barely be aware of it. The cruelty of Alzheimer's has robbed Ronald Reagan of the capacity for clear memory. But that doesn't apply to the rest of us."

"He seems, in some respects, a historical oddity now, his political and cultural presence obscured by the Clinton psychodrama and the Bush dynasty. But his successors do not begin to compare—either in achievement or legacy."

□ 1845

Madam Speaker, Reagan stood for two simple but indisputably big things: the expansion of freedom at home and the extinction of tyranny abroad. He achieved both.

When he came into office, the top tax rates in the United States were 70 percent. Against all odds, Reagan slashed the top rate to 28 percent and ignited the economic boom that is still with us.

He was right about taxation and the role of government. He was also right about the other great question of his day, the Soviet Union.

I will never forget the moment I heard his "evil empire" speech. It was broadcast on Radio 4 with skeptical British commentary about this inflammatory new president who knew nothing about the complexities of communism.

But for all the criticism, what came through in my teenage brain was the actual truth. Yes, the Soviet Union was evil. Who now doubts that? He alone saw that communism was destined to be put on the ash heap of history, as he told the House of Commons, and he helped put it there.

Think of Tony Blair and Bill Clinton. In the 1980s, they were nuclear freeze supporters; and yet both now thoughtlessly enjoy the soft and easy fruits of a greater man's courage.

The critics harp on the economic deficits of the Reagan era, but the truth is that the Federal revenue boomed on Reagan's watch. What created the deficits was an unprecedented increase in defense spending, the bargaining chip that eventually forced the Soviets to surrender.

The end of the welfare entitlement was also presaged by Reagan. Reagan's unlikely dream, the nuclear missile defense, is also still with us. Lampooned as "Star Wars," it will soon regain the pre-eminence it deserves in American military defense, as Donald Rumsfeld aggressively moves it forward.

He was devoted to his second wife with a romantic zeal, wore a coat and

tie at all times in the Oval Office, a room he considered sacred.

Madam Speaker, it takes time to recognize greatness and sometimes it appears in the oddest forms. When he dies, this country will go into shock. For Americans know in their hearts that this unlikely man understood the deepest meaning of their country in a way nobody else has done for a generation.

Madam Speaker, I remember when Ronald Reagan, just outside of this Capitol, stepped aboard Marine One for the last time and saluted back and left the presidency. I remember turning to my wife and saying, "He was a long time coming. He will be a long time gone."

Mr. President, on behalf of a grateful Nation, let me say, thank you, God bless you, and happy birthday.

Mr. LEWIS of California. Madam Speaker, will the gentleman yield?

Mr. GUTKNECHT. I yield to the gentleman from California.

Mr. LEWIS of California. Madam Speaker, I so much appreciate my colleague for taking a moment to express his deep appreciation for truly one of the greatest Americans of all time, former governor of California and President of the United States, Ronald Reagan.

I want to share with my colleagues just a couple of thoughts because my colleague has been kind enough to take this time.

I will never forget, while a member of the State Legislature, one day listening to television as I heard for the first time Ronald Reagan giving a speech for then candidate for President Barry Goldwater. And I rolled over and said to my family, "By golly, he ought to run for governor of California." And by golly, not very far after that, he did run and was successfully elected.

During that period of time, it was my privilege to work very closely with the governor. And people should know this about Ronald Reagan, two items I would mention. The first is it was my privilege to work with him on what is now known as the Child Development Act of 1972. It was the first quality preschool day-care act in the country and now serves as a model for the country. A Ronald Reagan-signed bill in 1972. And 25 years later the Federal Government discovered it might be an issue.

Another item: In the southland in my district in California, air quality is by far the most serious challenge we faced in the last 20 or 30 years. It was Ronald Reagan who signed model language developing a regional district that has developed the toughest clean air standards in the entire country, leading the country.

Above and beyond that, let me say that the gentleman is correct at pointing to this great man as President of the United States.

TRIBUTE TO RONALD REAGAN

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mrs. BIGGERT). Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from California (Mr. LEWIS) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. LEWIS of California. Madam Speaker, I wanted to further say to the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. GUTKNECHT) that the job that Ronald Reagan did as President, my colleague has expressed almost the wonderment of that very well. But the thing that we must all remember is that the East-West confrontation is now a thing of the past, and indeed we are on a pathway for long-term opportunities for peace, not just for the United States but for the world; and if it were not for Ronald Reagan's leadership, I cannot say that we would be there today.

So while I will be happy to yield to my colleague, I very much appreciate his commentary in working with us at this very serious time in his life congratulating him on his 90th birthday.

Mr. GUTKNECHT. Madam Speaker, if the gentleman would yield, if I could just say, I was one who sort of came of age politically under Ronald Reagan, and he was and always will be to me a tremendous teacher of true principles, and he seemed to have a tremendous understanding of the American people.

We certainly wish our current President, George W. Bush, the best. And we all, I think, could be better students of what Ronald Reagan tried to teach; and if we learn nothing else, it is that we need to continue to relearn those simple principles, I think we will all be better served.

Mr. LEWIS of California. Madam Speaker, I certainly very much appreciate the consideration of my colleague.

Madam Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. BURTON).

Mr. BURTON of Indiana. Madam Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding.

Let me just say that tonight we are going to hear, my colleagues, all kinds of great things that Ronald Reagan accomplished as President of the United States. But I want to tell my colleagues real briefly a little personal aside that happened to me.

My mother and stepfather, who died 2 years ago, both were working class people. My mother worked as a waitress for 18 years at L.S. Ayres & Co. Tea-room. She used to bring her tips home to help keep the house afloat. And my stepfather was what they called a sand hog in a foundry. Not very glamorous jobs.

When I entered politics, I told them one day I wanted to be a congressman to serve in the United States Congress. And, of course, they both had great aspirations for me, but they, in the back of their minds, thought I would never make it.

So I promised my mom and my dad that, if I ever made it to the United

States Congress, I was going to take them in the front door of the White House to meet the President of the United States, not the back door, but the front door.

And so, the time came when I was elected; and it just so happened that Ronald Reagan was the President of the United States and a man whom I think was one of the greatest Presidents we ever had. The day came when I was going to take my mom and dad over to the White House and go in the front door to meet the President. And unbeknownst to me, Ronald Reagan's staff, because the President had asked them to, had called and said, we want to know something about Dan Burton, his background and everything before he comes over so we can talk to his parents.

And when we went in the Oval Office to meet the President of the United States, this little waitress and this man who worked in a foundry all his life getting up at 5:30 in the morning, he walked in and he shook their hands and he started telling them what a great guy I was, and told them all the things he knew about me and what a great asset I was to the United States Congress. He did not need to do that, but it sure was great for me and it was great for my mom and dad.

And so, I thank President Reagan very much for making my mom and dad feel like they were two of the proudest people in the United States one day in my life.

Mr. LEWIS of California. Madam Speaker, I say to the President, our colleagues and all Americans join together in joining Ronald Reagan, our great President, a very happy 90th birthday.

FAMILY FARM EMERGENCY ENERGY ASSISTANCE ACT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Mississippi (Mr. SHOWS) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. SHOWS. Madam Speaker, the unusually cold winter and the dramatic increase in heating costs are hurting everybody in my State of Mississippi.

Clearly, we need to encourage more domestic production of oil and gas.

But in Mississippi, we need immediate action, we need help today, especially for our region's agriculture industry.

Some farmers and ranchers have seen their gas bills double and triple over the last year. And this is through no fault of their own.

Our own local economy depends on agricultural production, which is a major employer in many of our communities.

These days the industry has been devastated by the dramatic rise in the cost of gas. This may not be a natural disaster, like a tornado or a flood, but

this is a disaster just the same. This is an economic disaster that threatens the very existence of farms throughout our region.

Today I introduced a bill that will provide both immediate and long-term emergency assistance to our farmers and ranchers. My bill, the Family Farm Emergency Energy Assistance Act, will authorize the Secretary of Agriculture to provide grants that would not have to be repaid to help local agricultural producers deal immediately with financial pressures caused by this crisis.

This bill would also make low-interest loans available to help deal with the energy crisis for the months ahead.

This important legislation needs to be enacted quickly. Our farmers need help, and they need it now.

I am calling upon our leaders in Congress to move this emergency assistance bill quickly to passage. I will not rest until the Family Farm Emergency Energy Assistance Act becomes law.

EIGHTH ANNIVERSARY OF FAMILY AND MEDICAL LEAVE ACT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from California (Ms. WOOLSEY) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. WOOLSEY. Madam Speaker, yesterday was the eighth anniversary of the signing of the Family and Medical Leave Act.

Since 1993, that landmark legislation has allowed 35 million Americans to take time off from their jobs to be with children or ailing relatives without fear of losing their jobs. That is peace of mind for the American worker, and it is something that all workers need and deserve.

But even with FMLA in place, not all parents are taking the time off that is available to them. In fact, a recent study by the U.S. Department of Labor found that 88 percent of eligible employees who need time off do not take it because they cannot afford to go without a paycheck.

Scientific research shows that early bonding between parent and child is exceptionally critical to that child's future, to that child's success. Yet 83 percent of women who give birth are back to work within 6 months, and 70 percent of them say it is because they need the money.

Madam Speaker, America's children are paying the price for their parents' need to earn a living; and those parents are forced to choose between the needs of their children and putting food on the table. And that is not right.

The Family and Medical Leave Act has helped millions of families. But what we are finding out is there are millions more who are being left behind. It is time that the United States joined the more than 120 countries around the world that provide paid leave for new parents.

Let us face it, times are changing. If today's children are lucky enough to have two parents living with them, chances are that both parents are in the workforce and they work outside of the home. Parents are working hard. They are commuting long hours. And it is our children who are being left behind due to today's hectic lifestyles.

Studies find that parents are spending an average of 52 days a year less with their children than they did 30 years ago, 52 days a year less with their children.

We have to give parents the tools they need to bridge the gap between work and family, especially when there is a new baby in the home.

Along with Senator CHRIS DODD of Connecticut, I have, again with this Congress, introduced legislation to provide start-up funding for States that want to establish paid leave programs for new parents.

Already, my State of California offers new moms paid maternity leave through their State Disability Insurance. Women are eligible for up to 4 weeks of leave before delivery and 6 weeks after. That means a great deal for mothers. It means a lot to the newborns and the newly-adopted children. And, in the long-run, it will mean a great deal for the children as they grow up and become successful and are working on their futures.

But 10 weeks is not enough time. It is too short.

As a member of the Committee on Education and the Workforce, I continue to work to make education our top priority. But I have come to realize that having the best schools and the best teachers in the world will not matter if kids are not ready to learn when they enter the classroom.

One thing that we need to do to help them be ready to learn is have them bond with their parents right after birth or right after adoption.

□ 1900

As my cochairs and I on the Democratic Caucus Task Force for Children came to the conclusion last year that part of our children's agenda was paid for leave for new parents, we realize that it is more critical than ever to allow paid leave so that kids will get a good start.

Madam Speaker, parents want to be there for their children. Children are their number one priority. As a parent and a grandmother, I know how important those first weeks and months are to the parent and to the child. Let us show America's families, their parents and their children that the Family and Medical Leave Act was a good start but that these parents, these families, deserve more. Let us make paid leave for new parents a priority in this Congress.

Our children are 25 percent of our population, but they are 100 percent of our future.